

Message Text

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47

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

INRE-00 USIE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

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OC-05 CCO-00 OPR-02 AID-05 SAM-01 /092 W

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O R 161605Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7716

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION IMPROVES OR SISYPHUS TRIES AGAIN

REF: BEIRUT 15202 (1425Z)

1. SUMMARY: AGAINST ALL ODDS, LATEST CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT IN CAPITAL BEGAN TO TAKE HOLD EVENING DEC 15 AND SITUATION TENSE BUT MUCH IMPROVED MORNING DEC 16. COMBATANTS HAVE RELINQUISHED HOTEL DISTRICT AND OTHER AREAS TO INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES WHICH ARE SCHEDULED TO MOVE INTO ADDITIONAL TROUBLE CENTERS DURING THE DAY. AS GUNS FALL SILENT, BEIRUT HAS NOT YET THIS TIME WITNESSED UPSURGE OF FREE-LANCE SNIPING OR WHOLESALE KIDNAPPING, BUT RESIDENTS REACTING CAUTIOUSLY AND HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE CONTINUES TO OVERSEE ARMISTICE. TENTATIVE STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN, IN WAKE OF CEASEFIRE, TO ENLARGE CABINET AS KAMAL JUMBLATT RETURNED FROM SYRIA APPARENTLY IN MORE COOPERATIVE MOOD. INDICATIONS ARE THAT FONMIN KHADDAM'S WIDELY-EXPECTED VISIT MAY NOW BE DELAYED AT LEAST SEVERAL DAYS, BUT IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT SYRIANS AND PLO "MODERATES" PLAYED PRIMARY ROLE OF "WHIPPERS IN TO PACK" OF LEBANESE POLITICIANS, PRETENDERS AND WARLORDS. END SUMMARY.

2. SITUATION IN THE HOTEL DISTRICT BEGAN TO IMPROVE NOTICEABLY YESTERDAY AFTERNOON AS THE LATEST CEASEFIRE APPEARED TO BE TAKING EFFECT; THE AREA HAS REMAINED CALM THROUGH THIS MORNING. SMALL DETACHMENTS OF SECURITY FORCES (ISF), NUMBERING ABOUT 25 MEN EACH, HAVE BEEN STATIONED IN THE LARGE HOTELS, AND THE OPPOSING GUNMEN APPEAR FOR THE MOST PART TO HAVE WITHDRAWN. THE WITHDRAWAL WAS NOT WITHOUT INCIDENT, HOWEVER, AS LEFTISTS HOLDING THE PHOENICIA CLASHED WITH SECURITY FORCES WHO WERE MOVING IN, WITH SEVEN ISF WOUNDED IN FRACAS. RELUCTANT LEFTISTS ONLY DEPARTED AFTER THE PALESTINIAN ARMED STRUGGLE COMMAND (PASC) INTERVENED FORCEFULLY TO REMOVE THEM. SECURITY FORCES HAVE ALSO BEEN STATIONED IN VARIOUS PARTS OF BEIRUT, IN STRATEGIC BUILDINGS AND ALONG THE ROAD LEADING FROM THE PORT TO THE EMBASSY.

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3. DESPITE THE APPARENT SUCCESS OF THE CEASEFIRE IN THE HOTEL DISTRICT, SITUATION IN THE REST OF BEIRUT HAS THUS FAR NOT BEEN BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL. FIGHTING OCCURRED IN MOST OUTLYING HOT SPOTS, WITH PARTICULARLY HEAVY EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHIAH-AIN RUMANNEH, DEKWANEH-SIN EL FIL AND HADATH-LEILAKI. THIS MORNING BEIRUT RADIO REPORTED THAT ONLY THE DAMOUR ROAD WAS SAFE. AS OF THE MOMENT, WE DO NOT HAVE INDICATIONS THAT

SNIPERS HAVE TAKEN UP POSITIONS AS HAS SO FREQUENTLY OCCURRED IN THE WAKE OF GENERAL STANDDOWNS AND THERE HAS BEEN NO OUT-BURST OF INDISCRIMINATE KIDNAPPING. INFORMATION FROM THE TRIPOLI AND ZAHLE AREAS THIS MORNING IS SCARCE. IN THE NORTHERN AKKAR REGION, THREE WEST GERMANS WERE KIDNAPPED ON DEC 15. THEIR CAPTORS (UNIDENTIFIED LEFTISTS) ARE SAID TO HAVE DEMANDED AN UNSPECIFIED AMOUNT OF MONEY FOR THEIR RELEASE.

4. WITH SECURITY SITUATION HAVING TAKEN DRAMATIC TURN FOR THE BETTER, POLITICAL EFFORTS APPEAR LIKELY TO FOCUS UPON EXPANSION OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO ENCOMPASS REPS OF RIGHT (PHALANGE) AND LEFT (JUMBLATT). PERSONAL SECRETARY TO PRES FRANGIE TOLD US DEC 15 THAT "UNDERSTANDING" EXISTS BETWEEN FRANGIE AND KARAME AND THAT WORK ON ENLARGING THE CABINET, WHICH WAS TO HAVE BEGUN PRIOR TO MOST RECENT UPSURGE IN FIGHTING, WILL NOW CONTINUE AS PRIORITY ITEM. HE DECLINED TO PROVIDE TIME FRAME FOR SUCH A DEVELOPMENT, BUT MANY COMPETENT OBSERVERS AGREE THAT PROGRESS ON THIS ISSUE IS IMPORTANT IF HARD-WON AND STILL-FRAGILE CALM IS TO ENDURE.

5. JUMBLATT HAS RETURNED TO BEIRUT FROM DAMASCUS WHERE HE WAS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN CLOSETED FOR FOUR HOURS WITH PRES ASAD, FONMIN KHADDAM AND MEMBERS OF HIS ENTOURAGE. FROM REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED AS WELL AS PRESS COVERAGE, RETURNED JUMBLATT IS SOMEWHAT MORE MELLOW THAN LEFTIST LEADER WHO LEFT BEIRUT. JUMBLATT IS REPORTED TO HAVE STATED PUBLICLY IN DAMASCUS THAT HIS VISIT HAD OVERCOME THE DOUBTS GENERATED BY GEMAYEL'S RECENT SOJOURN IN THE SYRIAN CAPITAL AND LEADING DAILY, "AN NAHAR" BELIEVES THAT JUMBLATT IS NOW PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN CABINET (PROBABLY BY PROXY) WITHOUT PRECONDITION. IF TRUE, THIS CHANGE OF POSITION WOULD SUGGEST THAT HE HAS ACCEPTED THE OPPOSITION VIEW THAT A RESOLUTION OF THE SECURITY PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE GOL MUST PRECEDE ACCEPTANCE AND CONFIDENTIAL

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IMPLEMENTATION OF POLITICAL AND OTHER REFORMS. ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE JOURNALIST, WHO TALKED WITH JUMBLATT SHORTLY BEFORE HE WENT TO DAMASCUS, THE LEFTIST FIRE-EATER WAS PROMISING AT THAT TIME TO SET THE SYRIANS STRAIGHT AND ASSERTING THAT HE WOULD NOT JOIN THE CABINET UNLESS LEFTIST-SPONSORED REFORMS WERE ACCEPTED AND "WE (THE PROGRESSIVES) GET ONE-THIRD OF THE CABINET SEATS." THERE IS NOT RELIABLE INFORMATION REGARDING THE SCREWS THAT THE SYRIANS MAY HAVE TURNED, BUT ONE SOURCE CLAIMS TO HAVE HEARD THAT THEY TOLD JUMBLATT THAT IF HE DID NOT SHAPE UP, HE WOULD FIND HIMSELF THE SPOKESMAN FOR A MERE "RUMP" MOVEMENT COMPRISING HIS DRUZE AND THE COMMUNISTS. TRUE TO FORM, JUMBLATT HAS COUNTER-BALANCED HIS APPARENT TRACTABILITY WITH PREDICTIONS THAT THE CURRENT LULL IN FIGHTING WILL LAST NO LONGER THAN CHRISTMAS OR NEW YEAR'S DAY.

6. JUMBLATT'S RUMORED CONVERSION ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD WOULD REMOVE ONE OF THE MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCKS TO AN EXPEDITIOUS ENLARGEMENT OF THE CABINET. BEHIND-THE-SCENE RECONCILIATIONS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN THE ORDER OF THE DAY OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS AT LEAST. WE UNDERSTAND THAT NOT ONLY HAVE FRANGIE AND KARAME BEEN BROUGHT BACK INTO WORKING HARNESS (FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST) BUT THAT KARAME AND CHAMOUN WERE INDUCED TO KISS AND MAKE UP DURING A MEAL HOSTED DEC 14 AT THE HOME OF KAZEM AL KHALIL. CHAMOUN HAS SUBSEQUENTLY SEEN KARAME ONCE AGAIN AND IS SLATED TO CALL UPON YASSIR 'ARAFAT DEC 16. THERE IS SOME REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE MAJOR LEBANESE ACTORS OF THE PIECE HAVE BEEN PROMPTED AND, IN SOME CASES, LED THROUGH THEIR PACES BY THE SYRIANS AND/OR PLO "MODERATES".

7. NEW UPBEAT (WITH USUAL ANXIETIES AND RESERVATIONS) MOOD IN BEIRUT OVER LAST 24 HOURS HAS, ACCORDING TO MOST COMMENTATORS, LED SYRIANS TO CONCLUDE THAT VISIT BY KHADDAM ON CRASH BASIS NOT RPT NOT REQUIRED. SPECULATION NOW IS THAT HE WILL COME, PERHAPS WITHIN NEXT WEEK, TO KEEP LEBANESE NOSES TO GRINDSTONE IN WORKING FOR DENOUEMENT OF COUNTRY'S CRISIS. THERE ARE FEW FAMILIAR WITH LEBANON'S RECENT HISTORY, HOWEVER, WHO ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT IMPROVED CLIMATE AS GUARANTEE OF BETTER DAYS. HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE, WHICH PLAYED MAJOR ROLE IN SNUFFING OUT LATEST FLARE-UP, MET DEC 16 TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO KEEP THE LID IN PLACE AND MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIAL

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MUNICATIONS AMONG OPPOSING FACTIONS. BUT NO ONE SHOULD BE LULLED INTO BELIEVING THAT THE 19TH CEASEFIRE OF ROUND IV COULD NOT QUICKLY UNRAVEL AT THIS DELICATE POINT IN ITS SHORT LIFE.
GODLEY

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